ACTION GUIDE

RESPECT LIFE MONTH: OCTOBER

INTRODUCTION

Every October the Catholic Church in the United States celebrates *Respect Life Month*, and the first Sunday of October is observed as *Respect Life Sunday*. As Catholics, we are called to cherish, defend, and protect those who are most vulnerable, from the beginning to the end of their lives, and at every point in between. During the month of October, the Church asks us to reflect more deeply on the dignity of every human life.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops provides resources to help parishes, schools, families, ministries, and individual Catholics share the Gospel of life during Respect Life Month and throughout the year. In the following pages, you will find a number of resources to help you celebrate Respect Life Month. Action ideas and activities, a sample timeline, homily helps, announcements, and intercessions are provided to help you get started. Adapt these resources as needed to fit your specific circumstances. Additional materials can be found at respectlife.org/respect-life-month.

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SIMPLE STEPS

Here are some ways you can use the materials in your parish, school, ministry, or home to celebrate Respect Life Month. Not every step may apply to your circumstances, but most can be adapted to suit your needs. Unless otherwise noted, all materials referenced in this section can be found at respectlife.org/respect-life-month.

1. Display the Respect Life poster.

Think about a prominent place in your parish, school, diocesan office, or home. Hang the poster in the vestibule, on a door or window, on a bulletin board, or near the restrooms and water fountains. Choose a place where people will be most likely to see it. Parents could hang the poster on the refrigerator, a bedroom door, or a place you gather regularly as a family. *(Remember to seek appropriate permissions and follow any rules and guidelines if displaying the poster outside your home.)*

2. Feature the Respect Life reflection in your bulletin or newsletter or on your website.

The Respect Life reflection unpacks the meaning of the poster. If space prevents inclusion of the full reflection, consider using the short announcements that are available in this action guide along with one of our Respect Life Month graphics. The Respect Life reflection can also be printed in your diocesan paper, offered at the beginning of a parish meeting, or used to inspire discussion during a family meal.

We would love to see your Respect Life Month celebrations!
Show us how you celebrated by emailing prolife@usccb.org, or tag us on Facebook (fb.com/usccbrespectlife) or Twitter (@usccbprolife).

3. Preach about respect for human life on Respect Life Sunday.

Sample homily notes are provided for priests and deacons to help them highlight the gift of human life on Respect Life Sunday or another weekend in October. The Respect Life reflection can also be a source of inspiration. Let your pastor know these resources are available for him.

4. Pray for the protection of human life during the Prayer of the Faithful.

This is a great way for an entire parish or school to pray for the protection of life together! Sample intercessions are provided for use during the Prayer of the Faithful. The set of intercessions in this action guide could be used during one specific Mass or incorporated throughout the Sundays in October. Schools can use these to pray for the protection of human life at the beginning of the day or class period, or perhaps at a school Respect Life Mass. Families can include these intercessions in their regular prayers in the morning or evening, or before or after a family meal.

5. Feature a different Respect Life topic in each week's bulletin.

Short, quarter-page summaries are available for many of Respect Life articles covering a wide range of topics. Using the predesigned, downloadable "bulletin boxes," highlight a different topic each weekend of October. For those who would like to learn more, each bulletin box also includes the web address of the full article. Or, if you have the space, use one of the corresponding, full-length bulletin insert versions of the highlighted summaries. These can be found at the same web address listed in each bulletin box. These bulletin boxes can be found under the Respect Life Month action guide section of respectlife.org/action-guides.

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SAMPLE TIMELINE

Fall is a busy season! Families have returned from vacation, a new school year is beginning, ministries that may take breaks for the summer are back in full swing, and people are trying to return to regular routines. In the flurry of fall activities, October can easily sneak up on us! This sample timeline is provided to help you prepare for Respect Life Month. While these steps apply most directly to a parish coordinator, they can be adapted to help you think about key steps you can take to plan ahead in whatever capacity you serve the Church.

AUGUST

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

SEPTEMBER

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

OCTOBER

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

August 1

Visit respectlife.org/respect-life-month to review and familiarize yourself with the new materials. Compile any resources you hope to use during Respect Life Month. This would include bulletin announcements, intercessions, the Respect Life reflection, graphics, homily notes, article summaries, instructions for ordering printed materials, etc.

Early August

- Meet with your pastor to discuss possibilities for observing Respect Life Month. Let him know what resources are available, such as homily notes and prayer intercessions. Share your ideas with him, and ask permission for whatever you have in mind. Most importantly, *ask what you can do to help* and whether there's any other information he'd like you to provide. For example, perhaps emailing him the homily notes directly will save him time. Or he may ask you to send the prayer intercessions to parish staff.
- Following your conversation with your pastor, contact your parish office to open the lines of communication. Many parishes need content well in advance to include it in the weekly bulletin. Inquire about deadlines, and share what content you hope to have featured. This will help your parish plan ahead to allot the necessary space in the bulletin. If you plan to include materials such as bulletin boxes each weekend in October, you may need to make separate submissions. If you plan to do the interactive Respect Life bulletin board or another activity, you'll also need to plan for those announcements to be printed in the bulletin in advance. Sample announcements and instructions for the interactive Respect Life bulletin board are provided later in this action guide.

First Week of September

Begin gathering the materials you will need for the interactive Respect Life bulletin board. Enlist volunteers who might like to help you with the activity. This is a great way to get youth involved and invite parishioners to use their creative gifts.

Second Week of September

This is the time to tie up any loose ends, verify that all content has been received, and determine whether there are any follow-up tasks to be completed in the weeks ahead of Respect Life Month. Reconnect with the appropriate parish staff regarding your bulletin submissions. Touch base with your pastor to offer any further assistance that is needed and to confirm any plans you may have made.

End of September

Gather with your volunteers and bring the bulletin board materials. Put together the interactive Respect Life bulletin board using the instructions included later in this action guide. Improvise as needed, and make it your own!

October

Respect Life Month is here, and it's finally time to hang the poster in a place people will see it! Now is also a great time to begin sharing announcements about Respect Life Month on social media or in monthly newsletters. You may want to pre-schedule some social media posts throughout the month with graphics, prayer intercessions, or the reflection on this year's theme. (You could use or adapt the pre-written pulpit or bulletin announcements. And be sure to follow and share from the Facebook and Twitter accounts of the USCCB Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities! Facebook: www.fb.com/usccbrespectlife / Twitter: @usccbprolife)

First Sunday of October (Respect Life Sunday)

On Respect Life Sunday (or another Sunday in October), have volunteers staff a table near the interactive Respect Life bulletin board after each Mass. Provide examples of items to pin, as well as printed, take-home reminders to bring in and add their own items throughout the month. Volunteers can help explain the activity and answer any questions. Include Respect Life resources on various topics on the table as well. If your parish has the space, consider leaving the table up for the duration of Respect Life Month.

Mid-October

Monitor the content being added to the Respect Life bulletin board, and ensure that all materials are appropriate. Take special note of prayer requests, and consider how your parish community might pray for these specific intentions. Perhaps they can be included during a regularly scheduled Holy Hour or lifted up during a ministry gathering. You may also want to remember these intentions in your own daily prayers.

End of October

Take some pictures of the interactive Respect Life bulletin board. Consider taking some with those who helped and/or participated, including their unique contributions. These pictures* could be shared in a newsletter or on a parish social media page to highlight how your community celebrated Respect Life Month. These visual memories are also a great way to remember the final product and serve as examples if you'd like to do this activity in future years.

**Make sure to follow all parish and diocesan policies for taking and sharing photos, especially any policies pertaining to minors.*

BULLETIN & PULPIT ANNOUNCEMENTS

Bulletin Announcements

Today is Respect Life Sunday!
Join Catholics nationwide in celebrating Respect Life Month! respectlife.org/celebrate.

Pulpit Announcements

Option 1: Respect Life Sunday
(First Sunday of October)

Today is Respect Life Sunday, which kicks off Respect Life Month. We consider more deeply why *every* human life is valuable and reflect on how to build a culture that protects life from conception to natural death. See the bulletin for more information.

Option 2: Respect Life Month
(Any Weekend in October)

Every October, we celebrate Respect Life Month. We consider more deeply why *every* human life is valuable and reflect on how to build a culture that protects life from conception to natural death. See the bulletin for more information.

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INTERCESSIONS

These sample intercessions were written for use during Respect Life Month, but can be used (or adapted for use) at any time. Consider including one or more in the Prayer of the Faithful during Mass each weekend in October.

The intercessions can also be printed in the weekly bulletin, included during prayer at parish gatherings, featured in newsletters, shared on social media, or prayed during personal or family prayer times.

For all Catholics:
That on this Respect Life Sunday
our resolve may be strengthened
to uphold the dignity
of every human life;
We pray to the Lord:

That during this Respect Life Month
our resolve will be strengthened
to cherish and protect
the gift of every human life;
We pray to the Lord:

That the life of every human person,
from conception to natural death,
might be protected in our laws
and cherished in our hearts;
We pray to the Lord:

For women and men suffering after abortion:
May the Church's abortion healing ministry,
Project Rachel, help them find peace
and healing through Christ's endless mercy;
We pray to the Lord:

For those nearing the end of life:
May they receive care that respects their dignity
and protects their lives
as they place their hope
in the promise of eternal life;
We pray to the Lord:

May God grant us the wisdom and courage
to lovingly protect His gift of human life
at every stage, in sickness and in health;
We pray to the Lord:

HOMILY HELPS

On the first Sunday of October the Church in the United States celebrates Respect Life Sunday, and priests and deacons are encouraged to preach on the Church's teachings on human life. As Catholics, we believe that every human person is made in the image and likeness of God. Every human life is therefore sacred and inviolable and should be protected and cherished from conception until natural death. Practices such as abortion, assisted suicide, and capital punishment violate the dignity of the human person and must be rejected.

Each year, homily helps are provided to help priests and deacons preach on the sanctity of human life. Other ministry leaders can also use these notes during Bible studies, small groups, ministry gatherings, or other faith formation settings.

The Respect Life Month homily helps are available at respectlife.org/respect-life-month.

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SAMPLE ACTIVITY

Interactive Respect Life Bulletin Board

This activity utilizes the Respect Life poster to help create an interactive Respect Life bulletin board. The idea is to hang the poster in the center of a large bulletin board or other prominent area with space around it. Then, invite members of your parish, class, youth group, etc. to add their own items to the board or surrounding area that illustrate the gift of human life.

To illustrate the concept, you can pin some examples: a sonogram photo of a new family member; a birth announcement; a picture of aging grandparents; a flyer for an upcoming abortion-healing retreat; a note about volunteer opportunities at a local pregnancy center or nursing home; or a sticky note with a related prayer request. This is where you can get creative! Invite others to pin items that help illustrate the gift of human life, from beginning to end.

Materials

- Respect Life poster
- Large bulletin board (or a large wall or window)
- Push pins, masking tape, and/or a stapler
- Notecards or sticky notes
- Writing utensils (pens, pencils, markers)
- Scissors, *optional*
- Construction paper in various colors, *optional*

Directions

1. Place the poster in the center of a large bulletin board. (If you don't have a large bulletin board, you can also use a wall or window to achieve a similar result. Simply swap out push pins for masking tape.)
2. Include an explanation of the display beneath the poster so those who pass by can more fully enjoy it, or even participate.

> ***Sample Explanation***
>
> October is Respect Life Month. This display celebrates the gift of every person's life at every stage and in every circumstance. From birth announcements and pictures of aging loved ones to prayer requests and service opportunities, all are invited to add their own items highlighting how precious every life is.

3. Decide how many items you need to get the bulletin board started. You can choose from some of the examples listed above. Or, write one of the intercessions for Respect Life Sunday/Month on a notecard and post it on the bulletin board.
4. Invite others to join in the activity by contributing their own content to the bulletin board. You will need to determine the best way to explain it and have participants bring items in. For example, if your whole parish is invited to participate, consider putting a note in the weekly bulletin and/or making an announcement before or after Mass. In a classroom or youth group setting, you can simply explain the activity and perhaps send a note home to parents. Families can also do this activity at home.

Sample Announcements

Last Weekend of September

Please join us in celebrating Respect Life Month during October. We will be hosting an interactive Respect Life bulletin board in the _____. All parishioners are invited to participate. You can add items to the bulletin board that show the precious gift of human life. Examples: an ultrasound photo of a new family member; a birth announcement; a picture of aging loved ones; a note about volunteer opportunities at a local pregnancy center or nursing home; or a sticky note with a prayer request. Be creative! Materials will be on hand in the _____ to help you get started.

If you would like to have your item returned, please pick it up from the display by October [date]. Contact _____ for more information: _____.

First Weekend in October

This weekend, we celebrate Respect Life Sunday and kick off October as Respect Life Month. All parishioners are invited to contribute items to the Respect Life display located in the _____. For more information, stop by the display after Mass or see the bulletin. Contributions can be added throughout the month.

5. In smaller group settings, ask participants to share why they chose their specific items and what connections they see between their contributions and how precious every human life is.

Optional Embellishments

If you would like to be extra creative, use construction paper to decorate your bulletin board. Consider using coordinating or contrasting colors to cut out fun shapes to attach to the bulletin board. These embellishments can be added sparingly without needing to fill in the entire bulletin board to add simple pops of color and visual interest. You'll want to ensure there is still blank space to post other items.

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ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

The following list includes additional activities that you could incorporate into your observance of Respect Life Month in your parish, school, or ministry.

- Scripture study on Psalm 139, the Annunciation (Luke 1:26-38), the Visitation and Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), or other Scripture passages that highlight the dignity of each person, the gift of human life, and the responsibility to protect human life.
- A prayer service, praying for those present, as well as those who take or disregard human life. (See the "Prayer Service for Forgiveness and Healing.") Consider providing opportunities for the Sacrament of Reconciliation as part of the prayer service.
- A pilgrimage to pray for the protection of human life at local sites (such as churches, chapels, and other Catholic destinations, or places where the dignity of human life is or may be violated, such as abortion facilities, prisons, and hospitals). For those unable to attend in person, consider whether it's possible to live-stream the event.
- Small group conversations on topics pertaining to respect for human life, such as abortion, capital punishment, or assisted suicide.
- A talk by a Catholic who specializes in a field relating to respect for human life, such as a doctor who could speak to a Catholic vision of hospice care or a social worker who is knowledgeable in local pregnancy care services.
- A viewing of a movie, documentary, or other age-appropriate film relating to respect for human.
- A service project (on-site or off-site) related to providing care or assistance that supports and welcomes the gift of human life (such as pregnancy care centers).